

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

*Sub 3* 1. An exhaust gas purifying apparatus of an internal combustion engine, comprising:

exhaust gas purifying means, provided in an exhaust passage of the internal combustion engine, for adsorbing NOx in exhaust gas when an air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is lean, and releasing or reducing the adsorbed NOx when an oxygen concentration of the exhaust gas is reduced;

a light-off catalyst provided upstream of the exhaust gas purifying means in the exhaust passage, said light-off catalyst having a lower O<sub>2</sub> storage <sup>capability</sup> ~~ability~~ than said exhaust gas purifying means; and

control means for controlling the air/fuel ratio of the exhaust gas so that an atmosphere having a reduced oxygen concentration is produced around said exhaust gas purifying means when an NOx conversion efficiency of the exhaust gas purifying means is decreased.

*Sub 11* 2. The exhaust gas purifying apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein said exhaust gas purifying means includes,

an NOx catalyst that adsorbs NOx in the exhaust gas when the air/fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is lean, and releases or reduces the adsorbed NOx when the oxygen concentration of the exhaust gas is reduced, and

a three-way catalyst provided downstream of the NOx catalyst in the exhaust passage, for reducing harmful components in the exhaust gas when the air-fuel ratio of the exhaust gas is in the neighborhood of a stoichiometric ratio.

*Sub 11* 3. The exhaust gas purifying apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein an amount of oxygen adsorbed on said light-off catalyst is not greater than about 150 cc per one-liter volume of the catalyst when measured by an oxygen pulse method.

b 3 <sup>Sub</sup> p 1/4. The exhaust gas purifying apparatus as defined in claim 1, wherein an oxygen component stored in said light-off catalyst is not greater than about 25g per one-liter volume of the catalyst.

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